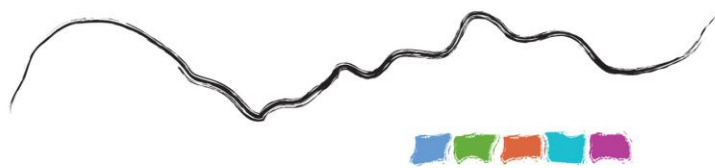


# Housing and Quality of Life in Helsinki

Leila Lankinen, Information Manager  
City of Helsinki Urban Facts



Based on an unpublished article by  
Maija Vihavainen and Leila Lankinen: Housing in Helsinki 1900 – 2009

City of Helsinki Urban Facts  
Centenary Conference 26 May 2011

# Housing and Quality of Life in Helsinki

Leila Lankinen  
Information Manager, City of Helsinki,  
Urban Facts

## Short overview to Helsinki's history before year 1900

Map: Helsinki City Plan, from year 1902  
Sinetti – Map Database

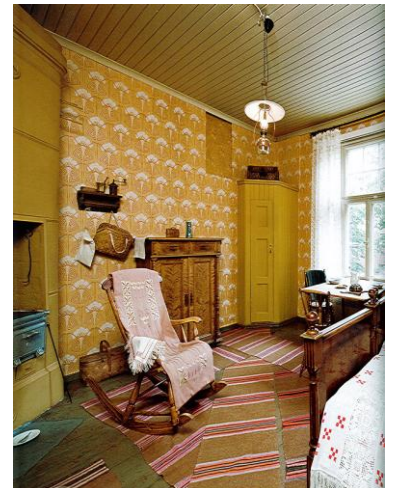


Helsinki was founded in 1550 by the order of King Gustavus Vasa of Sweden. For 200 hundred years the city remained a small sleepy village. In 1748, after Sweden had lost its eastern parts to Russia, Helsinki became an important seaside and fortress city of the country.

Helsinki felt itself as a mayor city in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its 93 000 population and 18 000 stock of houses. The city had grown rabidly both by numbers of inhabitants and houses after being nominated as the capital of Finland's Grand Duchy in 1812. The Empire style centre of the city originates back to that period of time.

## Housing and homes in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century

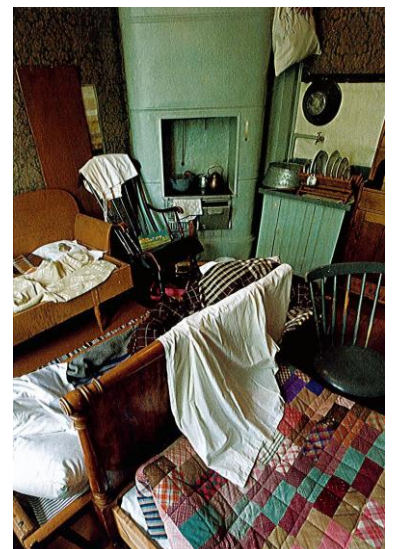
The grand administrative centre of the city tells very little of the housing conditions and everyday life of the inhabitants. Those who lived in stone houses in the city centre were mostly well off upper or middle class. Workers, salespersons and servants lived in the backyard houses or in barracks and shacks outside the street plan area.



The typical working class home included only one room where all daily duties were done and the room served as bedroom too. Running water, laundries, toilets, central heating and all the other modern conveniences were lacking. In fact even the upper class homes were heated by fireplaces and ovens in the kitchen and water or drain piping systems didn't cover all buildings. For example in the year 1910 22 per cent of dwellings had a bathroom and 32 per cent electricity.

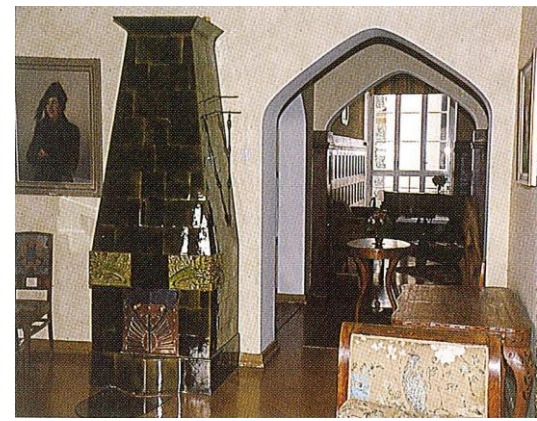
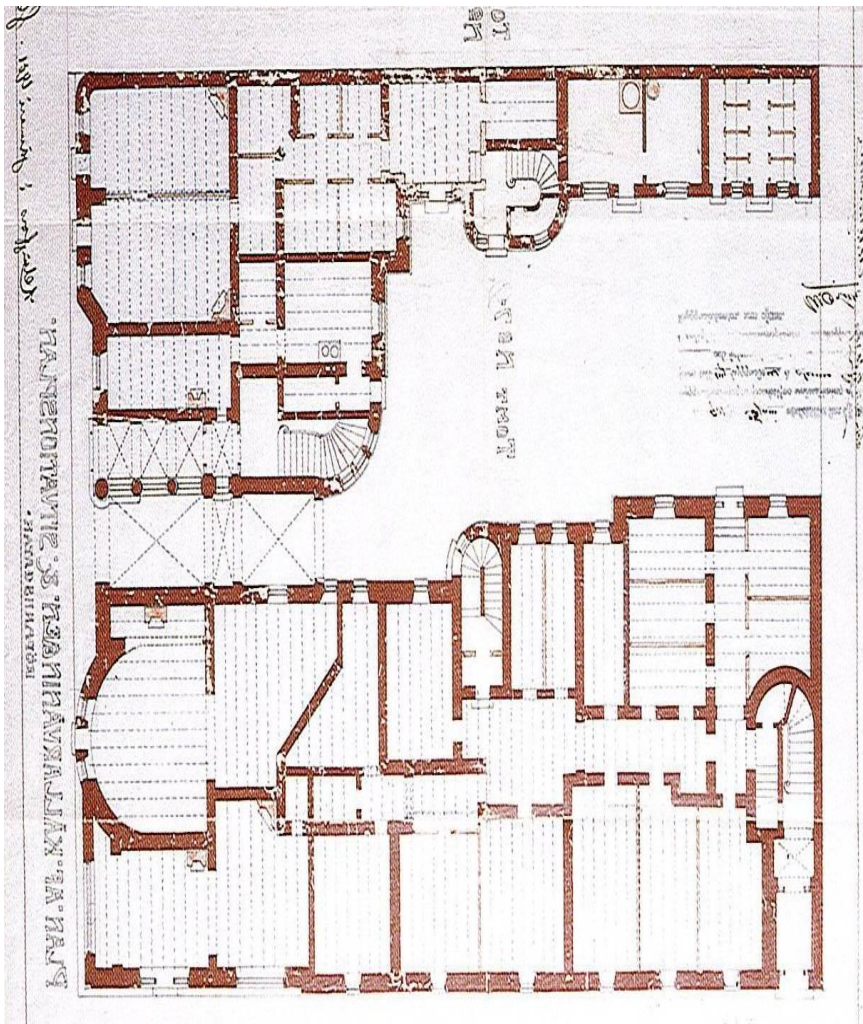
Wealthy families lived in houses or apartments with roomy representative halls and drawing rooms, a kitchen and a few bedrooms.

The distinctions in housing standards were enormous and values based on social class status defined the standards of living. The class society values dominated the living styles until 1950's.



Photos' source: Jäppinen Jere: Yhdeksän pientä kotia. Arjen historiaa Työväenasuntomuseossa. Helsinki City Museum 2009, Photo: Juho Nurmi





Housing construction was busy in the first ten years of 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of dwellings increased by 53 per cents and the growth was more rapid than the growth of population. (41%)

Construction work kept on growing rapidly even during the following decades and the standard of equipment got better and better. Electricity and water pipes were in more that 80 per cent of dwellings. Bathrooms were rare – about 33 per cents.

Most residents rented their flats – 85 per cent of all dwellings. Subtenant housing was commonly used to decrease the housing costs of the family and to offer a less expensive way of housing especially for young people, who had just moved in to the city.

During the first decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the big picture of housing development was very positive, but of course crises like economic depression in the beginning of 1930's and civil war at the end of 1910 had big stagnating influence to construction activities, housing markets and living conditions.

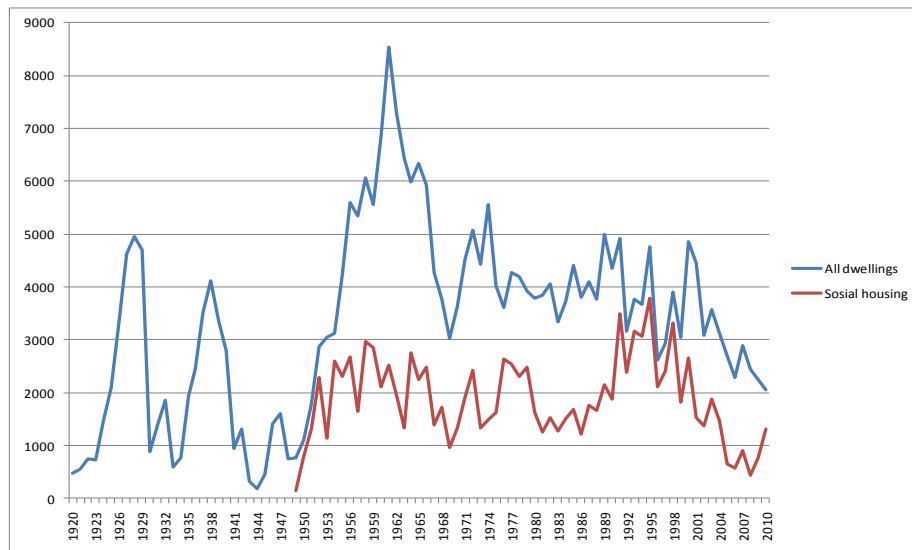
Photos' source: Halonen Tero: Olofborg. Katajanokan jugendlinnan vuosisata. Plataani Oy. Espoo 2002

### *Housing supply in balance in 1930's, war time meant misery*

In 1930's housing supply was estimated to be in balance according the statistical definition. In 1940's situation changed dramatically, when all activities had to be directed to manage the war time special situation and afterwards to fulfil the war indemnity and to settle the inhabitants of lost regions of Karelia.

In 1950's the estimated lack of dwellings was between 19 000 – 28 000 depending on the used methodology. That is around twenty per cent of the stock of dwellings (106 000). At the same time the number of homeless was bigger than ever in Helsinki's history and a lot of inhabitants had to live as subtenants or in temporary lodgings. Rent control, municipal procurement of housing and construction were used as resolutions to the housing shortage. The city had a lot of land areas for new construction production as the result of vast area incorporations in 1946.

## Dwelling construction in Helsinki 1920-2010



### *Housing standard after the Second World War*

Crowded living was common in Helsinki after the war. Compared to the other Scandinavian countries the average space per residents was about 10 square meters lower this was because of war but Finland was quite a poor country compared to its western neighboring countries.

The relativity of crowded housing can be seen in the change in definitions. In 1930's it was 4 persons per room (kitchen included) in 1950's only two. Nowadays crowded housing's definition in Finland is one person per room when kitchen is not included to the number of rooms.

In year 1950 22 per cent of households lived crowdedly. Kitchen was commonly used as bedroom. In year 1955 69 per cent of all kitchens were multi-purpose rooms. At present according to the 1950's standards only 0.3 per cent would be defined as crowdedly living.

Crowded housing has always been a special issue for families with children and that is the fact even today. In 2009 ten per cent of households lived in the houses where the number of bedrooms was smaller than the numbers of persons. When you look the families with four or more residents the share of crowded living was more than fifty per cent (56).



### *Democratic values reflected to the housing planning*

1950's and 1960's were the periods of rapid growth of new suburbs. The values of housing and planning emphasized families' needs, equality and closeness to the nature. The concept of villa and park city was based on city planning ideas of Otto I. Meurman. "The motto of modern architecture is no more parks to the cities but cities to the parks, that is, buildings around the nature."

Photo: City of Helsinki, Photo Database



1950's and 1960's the total number of new constructed dwellings was more than a hundred thousand. The big scale construction meant also pulling down poorly equipped buildings and total old one-family house areas.

After 1950's the sufficient number of rooms for a family's first owned dwelling was two rooms and a kitchen where families moved from one rooms apartments. Housing price has always been much higher in Helsinki than in other parts in Finland and families use to move more often. It has been calculated that the average living period in one flat is about seven years.

New suburbs got their inhabitants mostly from the old sock of buildings in central areas of the city. By moving residents got more space but also all modern equipments – central heating, running water, bathroom and a balcony.

Later in 1960's residents have more often moved to the suburbs direct from other parts of Finland. 1960's was an intense period of growth migration as the cause. In 1970's and 1980's migration was directed also to the neighbouring cities and later on to the regions smaller municipalities where the price of housing was lower and one-family house supply bigger.



### *Industrial housing construction and standardised homes in 1970's*

1970's was the starting point to the construction of prefabricated units, which speeded up construction production in big scale. At the same time it also standardised planning and architecture of houses. In Helsinki this period's suburbs are for example Pihlajamäki, Kontula and Myllypuro.



Photos: City of Helsinki, Photo Database

## *New individualistic ideas and urban values replaced the family centrality?*

In 1980's the ideas of subjective individualism contributed to the housing. Residents' needs were the leading idea of housing planning. (In Helsinki the planning process of Malminkartano area.)

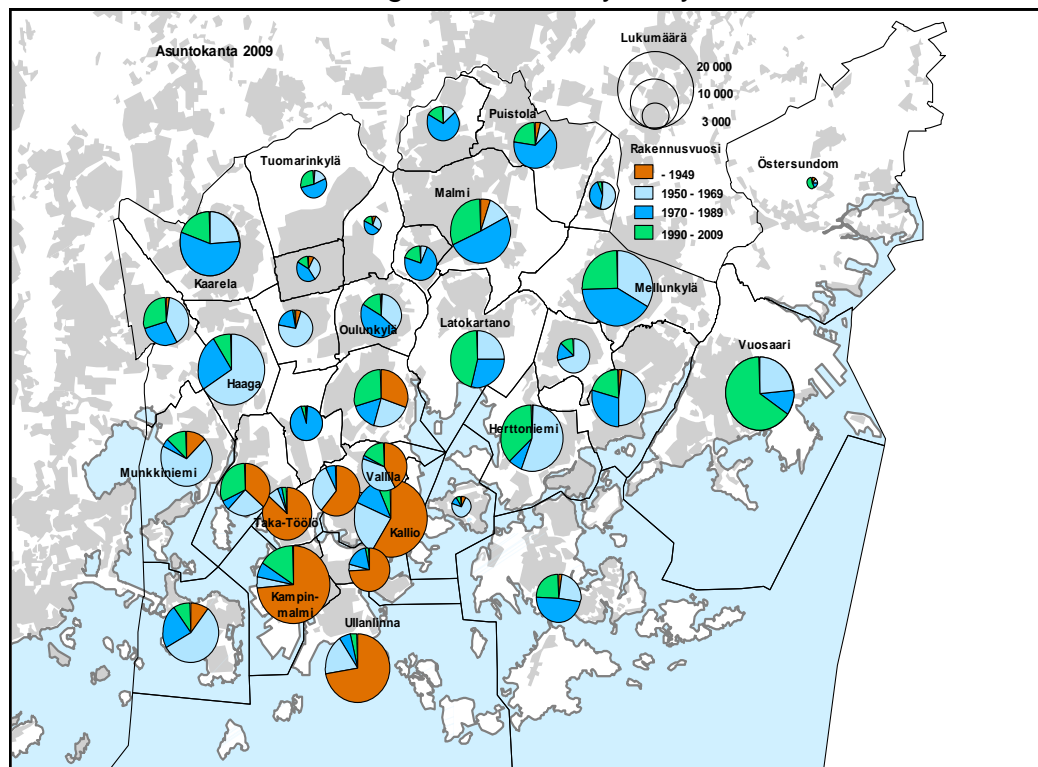
The other important feather of 1980's housing policy was dwellings' price and quality control system which was introduced in Helsinki. This so called HITAS system made it possible to construct new housing districts near the city center with quite reasonable prices. The first HITAS dwellings were completed in Katajanokka – near the conference hotel - and Western Pasila near the central park of Helsinki.

## *Concluding remarks*

The history of housing reflects ideas and values which can be seen even today in the quality of life in Helsinki.

- The dominant dwelling types are still one or two room and a kitchen. But compared to the situation 50 or hundred years ago also the households are small – in fact 80 per cent of households consist one or two persons.
- Helsinki as the most international and urban region in the country - and partly also because of its housing structure - is very popular migration destination for youngsters in the country and even overseas.
- This has ensured relative active and young population structure of the city. Thought, the share of senior citizens is one of the biggest in Europe.
- The different construction periods can be quite well identified in the city structure.

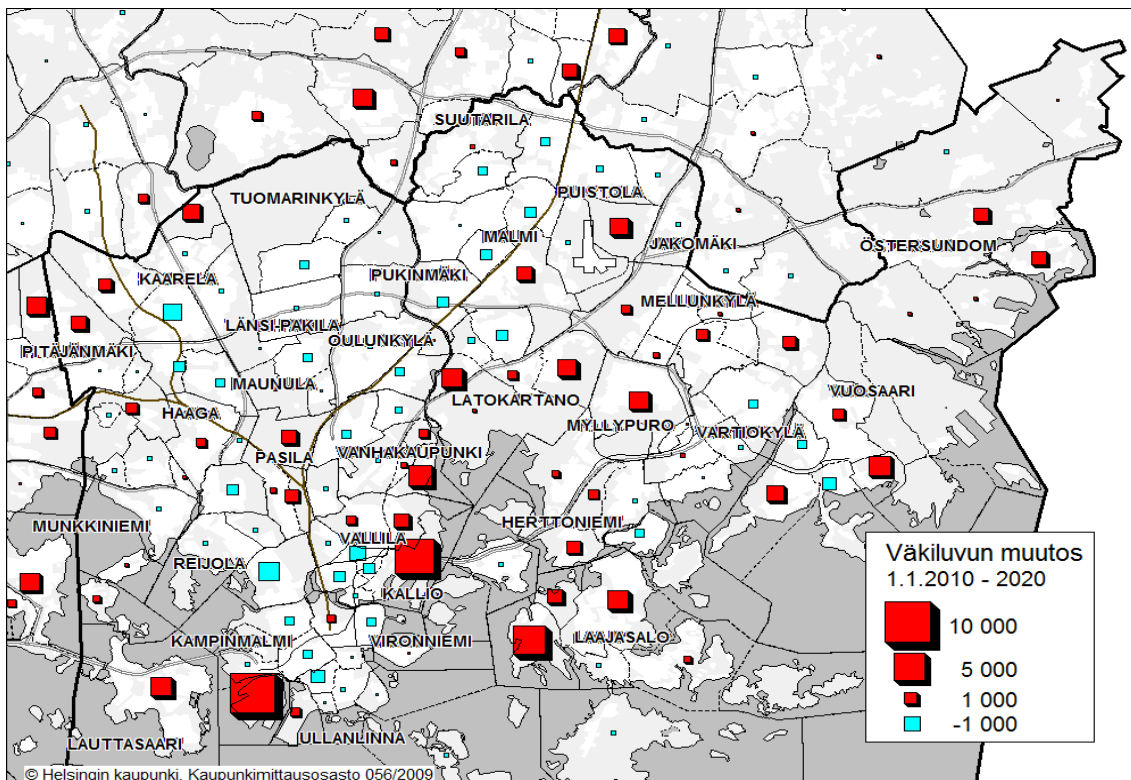
Slide 5: The stock of dwellings in Helsinki by the year of construction 2009



- The administrative centre of the city has been constructed at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, typical 1900 and 1910 buildings can be found in Katajanokka and Eira (Jugend style), 1930's and 1940's functionalism is well represented in Töölö district
- From 1950's and 1960's quite solid areas can be found in Western and Eastern suburbs - Haaga, Herttoniemi, Rauhuvuori
- Construction style from 1970's can be found at the outer ring around the 1950's and 60's suburbs for example the districts of Pihlajamäki, Myllypuro and Kontula, which represent typical.
- 1980's started more interactive and individualistic district and housing planning style. The growing need for family dwellings in the central parts of the city were recognized. Housing construction districts in Katajanokka and Ruoholahti were examples of former industrial, harbor and prison areas which were changes into housing purposes.
- It is also remarkable that all the mayor housing construction areas have been planned to utilize the public transport and rail traffic network of the city.

#### Challenges and possibilities for today:

Slide 6: Population change in Helsinki districts according to the forecast of the City of Helsinki 2010-2020



More so called brown areas has been released to residential areas near the city centre by the sea – Jätkäsaari, Kalasatama, Hanasaari – this an important possibility for the development of the city.



Slide 7 and 8: Plans for construction of new residential areas: Kalasatama, Jätkäsaari and Central Pasila  
Source: Helsinki City Planning Office

